



Duck

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Duck is the common name for a large number of species in the waterfowl family Anatidae, which also includes swans and geese. The ducks are divided among several subfamilies in the family Anatidae; they do not represent a monophyletic group (the group of all descendants of a single common ancestral species) but a form taxon, since swans and geese are not considered ducks. Ducks are mostly aquatic birds, mostly smaller than the swans and geese, and may be found in both fresh water and sea water.

Ducks are sometimes confused with several types of unrelated water birds with similar forms, such as loons or divers, grebes, gallinules, and coots.

Contents

- 1 Etymology
- 2 Morphology
- 3 Behaviour
 - 3.1 Feeding
 - 3.2 Breeding
 - 3.3 Communication
 - 3.4 Distribution and habitat
 - 3.5 Predators
- 4 Relationship with humans
 - 4.1 Domestication
 - 4.2 Hunting
 - 4.3 Cultural references
- 5 See also
- 6 References
- 7 External links

Duck



Bufflehead

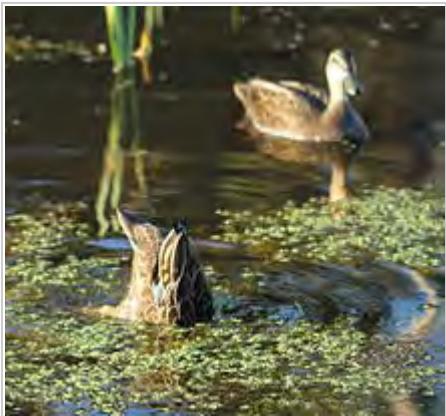
(*Bucephala albeola*)

Scientific classification

Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Aves
Order:	Anseriformes
Family:	Anatidae

Etymology

The word *duck* comes from Old English **dūce* "diver", a derivative of the verb **dūcan* "to duck, bend down low as if to get under something, or dive", because of the way many species in the dabbling duck group feed by upending; compare with Dutch *duiken* and German *tauchen* "to dive".



Pacific black duck displaying the characteristic upending "duck".

This word replaced Old English *ened/ænid* "duck", possibly to avoid confusion with other Old English words, like *ende* "end" with similar forms. Other Germanic languages still have similar words for "duck", for example, Dutch *eend* "duck" and German *Ente* "duck". The word *ened/ænid* was inherited from Proto-Indo-European; compare: Latin *anas* "duck", Lithuanian *āntis* "duck", Ancient Greek *nῆσσα/nῆττα* (*νῆσσα, νῆττα*) "duck", and Sanskrit *āti* "water bird", among others.



Mallard landing in approach

A duckling is a young duck in downy plumage^[1] or baby duck;^[2] but in the food trade young adult ducks ready for roasting are sometimes labelled "duckling".

A male duck is called a drake and the female is called a duck, or in ornithology a hen.

Morphology

The overall body plan of ducks is elongated and broad, and the ducks are also relatively long-necked, albeit not as long-necked as the geese and swans. The body shape of diving ducks varies somewhat from this in being more rounded. The bill is usually broad and contains serrated lamellae, which are particularly well defined in the filter-feeding species. In the case of some fishing species the bill is long and strongly serrated. The scaled legs are strong and well developed, and generally set far back on the body, more so in the highly aquatic species. The wings are very strong and are generally short and pointed, and the flight of ducks requires fast continuous strokes, requiring in turn strong wing muscles. Three species of steamer duck are almost flightless, however. Many species of duck are temporarily flightless while moulting; they seek out protected habitat with good food supplies during this period. This moult typically precedes migration.



Mallard drake



Male Mandarin duck

The drakes of northern species often have extravagant plumage, but that is moulted in summer to give a more female-like appearance, the "eclipse" plumage. Southern resident species typically show less sexual dimorphism, although there are exceptions like the paradise shelduck of New Zealand which is both strikingly sexually dimorphic and where the female's plumage is brighter than that of the male. The plumage of juvenile birds generally resembles that of the female. Over the course of evolution, female ducks have evolved to have a corkscrew shaped vagina to prevent rape.

Behaviour

Feeding

Ducks exploit a variety of food sources such as grasses, aquatic plants, fish, insects, small amphibians, worms, and small molluscs.

Dabbling ducks feed on the surface of water or on land, or as deep as they can reach by up-ending without completely submerging.^[3] Along the edge of the beak there is a comb-like structure called a pecten. This strains the water squirting from the side of the beak and traps any food. The pecten is also used to preen feathers and to hold slippery food items.

Diving ducks and sea ducks forage deep underwater. To be able to submerge more easily, the diving ducks are heavier than dabbling ducks, and therefore have more difficulty taking off to fly.

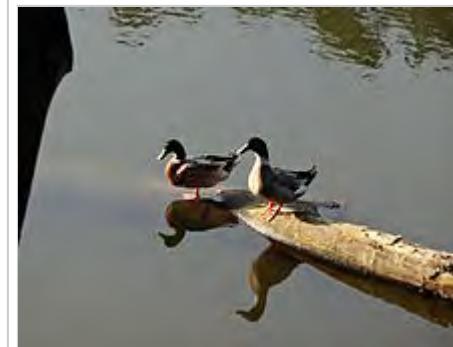
A few specialized species such as the mergansers are adapted to catch and swallow large fish.

The others have the characteristic wide flat beak adapted to dredging-type jobs such as pulling up waterweed, pulling worms and small molluscs out of mud, searching for insect larvae, and bulk jobs such as dredging out, holding, turning head first, and swallowing a squirming frog. To avoid injury when digging into sediment it has no cere, but the nostrils come out through hard horn.

The Guardian (British newspaper) published an article on Monday 16 March 2015 advising that ducks should not be fed with bread because it damages the health of the ducks and pollutes waterways.^[4]

Breeding

Ducks are generally monogamous, although these bonds usually last only a single year.^[5] Larger species and the more sedentary species (like fast river specialists) tend to have pair-bonds that last numerous years.^[6] Most duck species breed once a year, choosing to do so in favourable conditions (spring/summer or wet seasons). Ducks also tend to make a nest before breeding, and, after hatching, lead their ducklings to water. Mother ducks are very caring and protective of their young, but may abandon some of their ducklings if they are physically stuck in an area they cannot get out of (such as nesting in an enclosed courtyard) or are not prospering due to genetic defects or sickness brought



Ducks in the ponds at Khulna, Bangladesh



Pecten along the beak



A Muscovy duck duckling.

about by hypothermia, starvation, or disease. Ducklings can also be orphaned by inconsistent late hatching where a few eggs hatch after the mother has abandoned the nest and led her ducklings to water.

Most domestic ducks neglect their eggs and ducklings, and their eggs must be hatched under a broody hen or artificially.

Communication

Females of most dabbling ducks make the classic "quack" sound, but despite widespread misconceptions, most species of duck do not "quack". In general, ducks make a wide range of calls, ranging from whistles, cooing, yodels and grunts. For example, the scaup – which are diving ducks – make a noise like "scaup" (hence their name). Calls may be loud displaying calls or quieter contact calls.



duck eggs

A common urban legend claims that duck quacks do not echo; however, this has been shown to be false. This myth was first debunked by the Acoustics Research Centre at the University of Salford in 2003 as part of the British Association's Festival of Science.^[7] It was also debunked in one of the earlier episodes of the popular Discovery Channel television show *MythBusters*.^[8]

Distribution and habitat

The ducks have a cosmopolitan distribution. A number of species manage to live on sub-Antarctic islands like South Georgia and the Auckland Islands. Numerous ducks have managed to establish themselves on oceanic islands such as Hawaii, New Zealand and Kerguelen, although many of these species and populations are threatened or have become extinct.

Some duck species, mainly those breeding in the temperate and Arctic Northern Hemisphere, are migratory; those in the tropics, however, are generally not. Some ducks, particularly in Australia where rainfall is patchy and erratic, are nomadic, seeking out the temporary lakes and pools that form after localised heavy rain.



Ducks Foraging along the Lake Okanagan shoreline in Winter near Maude Roxby Wetlands

Predators

Worldwide, ducks have many predators. Ducklings are particularly vulnerable, since their inability to fly makes them easy prey not only for predatory birds but also for large fish like pike, crocodilians, predatory testudines such as the Alligator snapping turtle, and other aquatic hunters, including fish-eating birds such as herons. Ducks' nests are raided by land-based predators, and brooding females may be caught unaware on the nest by mammals, such as foxes, or large birds, such as hawks or owls.

Adult ducks are fast fliers, but may be caught on the water by large aquatic predators including big fish such as the North American muskie and the European pike. In flight, ducks are safe from all but a few predators such as humans and the peregrine falcon, which regularly uses its speed and strength to catch ducks.



Ringed teal

Relationship with humans

Domestication

Ducks have many economic uses, being farmed for their meat, eggs, and feathers (particularly their down). They are also kept and bred by aviculturists and often displayed in zoos. Almost all the varieties of domestic ducks are descended from the mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), apart from the Muscovy duck (*Cairina moschata*).^{[9][10]} The Call duck is another example of a domestic duck breed. Its name comes from its original use established by hunters. This was to attract wild mallards from the sky, into traps set for them on the ground. The Call duck has also received a place as the world's smallest domestic duck breed, as it weighs less than 1kg.^[11]

Hunting

In many areas, wild ducks of various species (including ducks farmed and released into the wild) are hunted for food or sport, by shooting, or formerly by decoys. Because an idle floating duck or a duck squatting on land cannot react to fly or move quickly, "a sitting duck" has come to mean "an easy target". These ducks may be contaminated by pollutants such as PCBs.

Cultural references

In 2002, psychologist Richard Wiseman and colleagues at the University of Hertfordshire, UK, finished a year-long LaughLab experiment, concluding that of all animals, ducks attract the most humor and silliness; he said, "If you're going to tell a joke involving an animal, make it a duck."^[12] The word "duck" may have become an inherently funny word in many languages, possibly because ducks are seen as silly in their looks or behavior. Of the many ducks in fiction, many are cartoon characters, such as Walt Disney's Donald Duck, and Warner Bros.' Daffy Duck. Howard the Duck started as a comic book character in 1973, made in 1986 into a movie.^[13] The 1992 Disney film *The Mighty Ducks*, starring Emilio Estevez chose the duck as the mascot for the fictional youth hockey team who are protagonists of the movie, based on the duck being described as a fierce fighter. This led to the duck becoming the nickname and mascot for the eventual National Hockey League professional team Anaheim Ducks. The duck is also the nickname of the University of Oregon sports teams as well as the Long Island Ducks minor league baseball team.

See also

- Duckwalk
- Duck crossing

- Duck face
- Duck test
- List of duck breeds
- List of fictional ducks
- Rubber duck
- United Poultry Concerns

References

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External links

- Media related to the Anatidae (<http://ibc.lynxeds.com/family/ducks-geese-swans-anatidae>) on the Internet Bird Collection
- [1] (<http://forum.backyardpoultry.com/viewtopic.php?f=16&t=8030010>) Backyard Poultry - Keeping Ducks as Pets
- list of books (<http://seaducks.org/subjects/MIGRATION%20AND%20FLIGHT.htm>) (useful looking abstracts)
- Ducks on postage stamps (<http://www.stampsbook.org/subject/Duck.html>)
- *Ducks at a Distance*, by Rob Hines at Project Gutenberg - A modern illustrated guide to identification of US waterfowl.



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Wikibooks Cookbook has a recipe/module on **Duck**

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